



Betcha' didn't know...

1. On July 7, 1919, a young army captain named Dwight David Eisenhower joined 294 other members of the army and departed from Washington, D.C., in the military's first automobile caravan across the country. Due to poor roads and highways, the caravan averaged five miles per hour and took 62 days to reach Union Square in San Francisco.

2. At the end of World War II, General Dwight David Eisenhower surveyed the war damage to Germany and was impressed by the durability of the Autobahn. While a single bomb could make a train route useless, Germany's wide and modern highways could often be used immediately after being bombed because it was difficult to destroy such a wide swath of concrete or asphalt.

3. In the 1950s America was frightened of nuclear attack by the Soviet Union (people were even building bomb shelters at home). It was thought that a modern interstate highway system could provide citizens with evacuation routes from the cities and would also allow the rapid movement of military equipment across the country.

4. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1938 was the first serious attempt to develop a national roadway system. Under the auspices of the Bureau of Public Roads, the goal of this act was to study the feasibility of a toll-financed system of three east-west and three north-south superhighways. From this study, officials found out this system could not be self-supporting. They advocated for a 26,700-mile network financed by the federal and state governments instead.

5. Congress passed further legislation in the form of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944. The act chartered a "National System of Interstate Highways" and expanded the network to 40,000 miles. Soon state highway agencies and the Department of Defense planned nationwide routes. However, because no specific funds were authorized for construction, progress was slow.



The first transcontinental automobile caravan made a stop in Tama.



Harvey F. Firestone (far left) entertained the men and officers of the transcontinental trek at his home near Columbiana, Ohio, in 1919. Captain Dwight D. Eisenhower is at the far right.



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6. Soon after becoming president in 1953, President Eisenhower authorized the first funding of the interstate system. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1954 set aside \$175 million for the project. However, even more money was needed for the system that Eisenhower envisioned, and he continued to

press for funds. Two years later, the expanded Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 authorized a budget of \$25 billion, of which the federal share would be 90 percent, states would contribute the remaining 10 percent.

7. Further legislation over the years continued to expand the total length of the system, which now stretches for more than 74,600 km (46,380 mi). In 1990, in recognition of President Eisenhower's pivotal role in building the national system of interstate highways, President George Bush signed legislation officially renaming it the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways.

8. President Eisenhower and his staff worked for two years to get the world's largest public works project approved by Congress. On June 29, 1956, the Federal -Aid Highway Act of 1956 was signed, and the interstates, as they would be known, began to spread across the landscape.

9. The first stretch of interstate, an eight-mile segment in Topeka, Kansas, opened Nov. 14, 1956, barely five months after the 1956 Act was signed.

10. The last link, Interstate 105 in Los Angeles, was not completed until 1993.

11. In 1957 the red, white and blue shield symbol for the interstates' numbering system was developed.



I-29 near Floyd monument in Sioux City in 1959.



I-29 near the Missouri River in Sioux City in 1959.



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12. Two-digit interstate highways are numbered according to direction and location. Highways running north-south are odd numbered, while highways running east-west are even numbered. The lowest numbers are in the west and in the south.

13. Three-digit interstate highway numbers represent beltways or loops, attached to a primary interstate highway (represented by the last two numbers of the beltway's number). Washington D.C.'s beltway is numbered 495, because its parent highway is I-95.

14. The interstate sign itself measures 36 inches high, and is 36 inches wide for two-digit interstates, or 45 inches for three-digit interstates.

15. In the late 1950s, the signs displaying white lettering on a green background were made official. Specific motorist-testers drove along a special stretch of highway and voted on which color was their favorite - 15 percent liked white on black, 27 percent liked white on blue, but 58 percent liked white on green best.

16. The initial cost estimate for the interstate system was \$25 billion over 12 years; it ended up costing \$114 billion, taking 35 years to complete. As of 2004, the system contains over 42,700 miles (68,500 km) of roads, all at least four lanes wide.

17. A widespread, but false, urban legend states that one out of every five miles of the Interstate Highway System must be built straight and flat, so as to be usable by aircraft during times of war. However, it was the Germans in World War II that used the Autobahns for just such a purpose.

18. In addition to being designed to support automobile and heavy truck traffic, interstate highways are also designed for use in military and civil defense operations within the United States, particularly troop movements.



I-35/80 mixmaster northeast of Des Moines looking north in 1960.



Pouring concrete on I-80 in Jasper County just east of U.S. 6 in 1962.



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19. One potential civil defense use of the Interstate Highway System is for the emergency evacuation of cities in the event of a potential nuclear war. Although this use has never happened, the Interstate Highway System has been used to facilitate evacuations in the face of hurricanes and other natural

disasters. An option for maximizing volume is to reverse the flow of traffic on one side so that all lanes become outbound lanes. Several interstates in the southern U.S., including I-16 in Georgia, I-40 in North Carolina, I-65 in Alabama, and I-10 in Louisiana, are equipped and signed for reverse flow, with crossovers after major interchanges to distribute much of the traffic.

20. While the name implies that these highways cross state lines, many interstates do not. Rather, it is the system of interstates that connects states.

21. Interstates 50 and 60 do not exist, mainly because they would've most likely passed through the same states that already have U.S. 50 and U.S. 60. National standards discourage interstates and U.S. highways with the same number to exist in the same state.

22. Strict adherence to the directional nature of the system results in some amusing oddities. For a 10-mile stretch east of Wytheville, Virginia, the driver can be traveling on both North I-81 and South I-77 at the same time (and vice versa.)

23. Business Loop and Business Spur interstates are not subject to any of the interstate standards. Their designation is simple - a Business Loop heads into a downtown area from its parent and returns to its parent; a Business Spur ends downtown.



Placing mesh on I-80 in Jasper County just east of U.S. 6 in 1962.



Batch plant on I-80 just west of U.S. 71 in 1965.



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24. About 72 percent (2003 FHWA summary) of the annual interstate construction and maintenance costs are funded through user fees, primarily gasoline taxes, collected by states and the federal government, and tolls collected on toll roads and bridges. The rest of the costs come out of the federal budget.

25. In Vinita, Okla., a McDonalds restaurant is built over top of Interstate 44. It goes from one side of the interstate to the other, passing over the interstate. Customers can sit inside and eat while traffic drives beneath them.

26. In Kearney, Neb., The Great Platte River Road Archway Museum is built over top of Interstate 80. The 1,500-ton structure spans 308 feet across the interstate and houses a museum dedicated to frontier culture.

27. In Reno, Nev., a Walgreens store sits on top of a segment of Interstate 80 in downtown Reno.

28. In Newton, Mass., a Star Market supermarket is built over the top of Interstate 90. Traffic reporters refer to this point on the highway as the “Star Market overpass.”

29. In Newton, Mass., a Sheraton hotel is built over the top of Interstate 90.

30. In Boston, Mass., The Prudential Tower in downtown Boston is built over top of Interstate 90.

31. Highest Point: Interstate 70 at Eisenhower Tunnel in Colorado, 11,192 feet above sea level.



Paving I-35 between Ankeny and Des Moines in 1965.



This stretch of I-80 was opened to traffic Dec. 13, 1966.



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32. Lowest Point (excluding tunnels): Interstate 8 near El Centro in California, approximately 47 feet below sea level (exact lowest point is not officially measured.)

33. The five longest interstate routes, each more than 2,000 miles, are east-west routes. These are: I-90, 3,020.54 miles

from Seattle, Wash., to Boston, Mass.; I-80, 2,899.54 miles from San Francisco, Calif., to Teaneck, N.J.; I-40, 2,555.40 miles from Barstow, Calif., to Wilmington, N.C.; I-10, 2,460.34 miles from Los Angeles, Calif. to Jacksonville, Fla.; and I-70, 2,153.13 miles from Cove Fort, Utah, to Baltimore, Md.

34. Among the 2-digit interstate routes, the five shortest are: I-73, 12.27 miles, Emery to Greensboro, N.C.; I-97, 17.62 miles, Annapolis to Baltimore, Md.; I-99, 53 miles, Bedford to Bald Eagle, Penn.; I-19, 63.35 miles, Nogales to Tucson, Ariz.; and I-66, 74.80 miles, Strasburg, Va. to Washington, D.C.

35. The shortest interstate route segment is I-95 in the District of Columbia, which is 0.11 mile long.

36. The states typically use one of two methods of numbering the interstate interchanges:

- The Consecutive numbering system: Starting at the most westerly or southerly point on each interstate route, interchanges are numbered consecutively. Thus, the first interchange becomes Interchange #1. Each succeeding interchange is numbered consecutively as #2, 3, 4, etc.
- The Milepost numbering system: All interstate routes are mile posted beginning at the most westerly or southerly point. The beginning point is milepost "0." If the first interchange on the route is located between milepost 4 and 5, it is numbered as Interchange #4. The next interchange, if located at milepost 8.7, would be numbered as Interchange #8, etc. With this system, the motorist can easily determine the location and distance to the desired interchange.



Grading on I-80 in Dallas County east of Dexter in 1966.



Paving train on I-80 in Dallas County east of Dexter in 1966.



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37. In the contiguous 48 states and the District of Columbia, 62 main one- or two-digit numbered routes have been assigned. Of these, 27 are in a primarily east-west alignment and, therefore, carry an even number. Another 35 routes are odd-numbered because of their primarily north-south alignment. Although 261 auxiliary circumferential, spur and radial

routes are designated, only 151 three-digit numbers have been assigned. This is because three-digit numbers can be used in more than one state. The oldest interstate segments actually predate the establishment of the Interstate System. Early examples include a portion of the Grand Central Parkway in Queens, New York, which was opened to traffic in July 1936, and later was incorporated into the Interstate System as I-278. The Pennsylvania Turnpike between Irwin (southeast of Pittsburgh) and Carlisle (west of Harrisburg) was officially opened in October 1940, and is now designated as I-76 and I-70. Other freeways and toll roads were incorporated into the system under the 1956 Act, as an alternative to building new competing interstate routes.

38. The Interstate System connects 45 of the 50 state capitals, as well as the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. The five state capitals not directly served by the Interstate System are Juneau, Alaska; Dover, Del.; Jefferson City, Mo.; Carson City, Nev.; and Pierre, S.D.



An all-woman crew laid and tied reinforcing rod.



Westbound rest area on I-80 near Wilton in 1967.



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39. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 called for uniform geometric and construction standards for the Interstate System. The standards, which have been revised periodically over the years, were developed by the state transportation departments, through the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), and

adopted by the Federal Highway Administration. The standards include a minimum of four 12-foot wide travel lanes, a minimum shoulder width of 10 feet, full control of access, and design speeds of 50 to 70 miles per hour (depending on the type of terrain). Initially, the design had to be adequate to meet the traffic volumes expected in 1975. Later, the requirement was changed to a more general 20-year design period rather than for a specific year to allow for evolution of the system.

40. In a few cases, a major route has two parallel or diverging branches. In those cases, each branch is given the designation of the main route, followed by a letter indicating a cardinal direction of travel (east, west, etc.). In Texas, for example, I-35 splits at Hillsboro, with I-35E going through Dallas, while I-35W goes through Fort Worth. The two branches merge at Denton to reform the main route--I-35.

41. An exact count of rest areas on the Interstate System is not available. However, a count in 1972 reported 1,214 rest areas in existence. The number still operational today is not expected to differ dramatically from the 1972 figure.

42. To avoid duplication within a state, a progression of prefixes is used for the three-digit numbers. For example, if I-80 runs through three cities in a state, circumferential routes around these cities would be numbered I-280, I-480 and I-680. The same system would be used for spur routes into the three cities, with routes being numbered I-180, I-380 and I-580. This system is not carried across state lines. As a result, two cities in different states along I-80 may each have circumferential beltways numbered I-280 or spur routes numbered I-180.



Form work on I-35 north of Ellsworth in 1967.



Aim for Ames. I-35 between U.S. 20 and Ames opened Dec. 8, 1967.



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43. A National Road was built in 1815 that ran between Maryland and St. Louis, and facilitated immigration to the central United States. This road, however, fell into disrepair. It wasn't until the late 1930s that Dwight D. Eisenhower advocated for the transcontinental system of highways that eventually took his name.

44. While some states have maintained the 65 mph limit, other states have increased the limits to 70 or 75 mph (110 or 120 km/h). Generally, the highest speed limits are found in the south and southwest, while the lowest are found in the northeast. Soon after the end of the National Minimum Speed Limit, the state of Montana ended daytime speed limits for automobile traffic on interstate highways in the state, instead instructing motorists to maintain a "reasonable and prudent" speed. A few years later, the "reasonable and prudent" law was declared unconstitutional for being too vague. A limit of 75 mph (120 km/h) was enacted in its place.

45. The top ten influences on the American metropolis of the past 50 years:
(According to the Fannie Mae Foundation Survey)

- 1) The 1956 Interstate Highway Act and the dominance of the automobile.
- 2) Federal Housing Administration mortgage financing and subdivision regulation.
- 3) De-industrialization of central cities.
- 4) Urban renewal — downtown redevelopment and public housing projects (1949 Housing Act).
- 5) Levittown (planned communities and the mass-produced suburban tract house).
- 6) Racial segregation and job discrimination in cities and suburbs.
- 7) Enclosed shopping malls.
- 8) Sunbelt-style sprawl.
- 9) Air conditioning.
- 10) Urban riots of the 1960s.



Looking east on I-480 in Council Bluffs in 1967.



The final segment of I-235 in Des Moines opened on October 30, 1968.



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46. Interstate highways make up less than 1 percent of the total U.S. highway mileage, but the interstates carry over 20 percent of all traffic.

47. In modern history, France was the first Western nation to begin building a system of national highways (1716).

48. If the hundreds digit of a bypass (the "4" in "405") is even, then it is likely (at least planned) that after the bypass splits off from its parent highway, the bypass will join up with its parent again. If the hundreds digit is odd, then the bypass was not expected to reconnect with the parent highway.

49. There are 21 "secret" interstate routes. These routes are officially part of the Eisenhower Interstate System essentially only on paper, as no shields or other signage of their existence is posted. They are federally maintained and adhere to the standards of any other signed interstate highway. In many cases they are unsigned as to not confuse or overburden motorists with an additional number on an already signed route. For example, this occurs in Maryland with the segment of I-595 as it is already known as U.S. 50 and U.S. 301.

50. In preparation for the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate Highway System in 2006, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) on Wednesday, June 29, 2005, launched a web site dedicated to honoring that historic event, <http://www.interstate50th.org>.



Placing CRC (continuously reinforced concrete) steel on I-35 in Franklin County in 1975.